

# RELIGION, SOCIAL BOUNDARIES, AND IDENTITY IN SOUTH ASIA

Rel 373  
Fall 2006

<http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel373ramey.html>

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Dr. Steven W. Ramey  
Office: 202 Manly, 348-4218  
REL Office: 212 Manly, 348-5271  
Email: [sramey@bama.ua.edu](mailto:sramey@bama.ua.edu)

M 2:00 - 4:40, 210 Manly Hall  
Office Hours: T/R 10-11  
W 9:30-11:30  
and by appointment

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How do religious traditions seem to espouse human unity and harmony on the one hand and division and violence on the other? This course will investigate questions such as this by analyzing critically the various ways people identify themselves and separate groups from each other. While these divisions involve many elements, such as nationality, ethnic/linguistic identity, gender, and occupation, aspects of human experience commonly identified as religious frequently intersect with these divisions. Through a series of case studies focusing on South Asia, we will investigate how communities construct these boundaries legally and informally, how these boundaries have changed over time, and how minority communities contest the dominant forms of these boundaries. Through this study, we will theorize about the relation of religions to various aspects of human experience and the accuracy of different representations of these relationships in both society and scholarship.

In this room, we become a community of scholars, constantly refining our academic skills as well as developing our understanding of various subjects. Approaching religion in an academic setting requires that we think critically to analyze the persuasiveness and biases within any idea. We need to approach a range of viewpoints with both a willingness to question them and an equal willingness to appreciate their strengths. To make the class successful, each scholar must listen respectfully to the opinions of others and contribute their insights honestly. No one has to accept a particular viewpoint, but everyone needs to understand the variety of opinions and the reasoning behind those opinions.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- 1) Deepen understanding of the complexity surrounding religions in the context of South Asia
- 2) Apply the theoretical issues related to social boundaries and identity to the study of religions
- 3) Refine methods for researching issues in the study of religious traditions
- 4) Develop critical thinking and reading skills
- 5) Improve communication skills through writing and class discussions

## **TEXTS**

- Bose, Shonali. *Amu: A Novel*. Penguin Books India, 2004.
- Flueckiger, Joyce. *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Ilaiyah, K. *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva, Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*. Bhatkal Books International, 1996.

Nandy, Ashis. *Exiled at Home: Comprising At the Edge of Psychology, The Intimate Enemy and Creating a Nationality*. London: Oxford University Press, 1998.

## CONSULTATIONS

All students are encouraged to come to my office hours or contact me for assistance. Feel free to call my office (348-4218), or email me, [sramey@bama.ua.edu](mailto:sramey@bama.ua.edu).

Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate routine absences. Although I cannot guarantee that reasonable accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance our ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you.

Students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact me as soon as possible to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodations that can be made to meet their needs. Students must also contact the Office of Disability Services in Martha Parham East.

## GRADING

Attendance/Participation including Current Events presentations		150 points
Student Presentations on Readings	(33 points each)	100 points
Summary Essays on Presented Readings	(50 points each)	150 points
Essay on 20 November movie		200 points
Research Paper (including paper presentation)		400 points

Grades will be assigned according to the following ranges: 930-1000 = A; 900-920 = A-; 870-890 = B+; 830-860 = B; 800-820 = B-; 770-790 = C+; 730-760 = C; 700-720 = C-; 600-690 = D; 0-590 = F

All academic work must be the product of the student submitting it. Cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and acknowledgment) is a serious scholarly offence. If I discover that a student has copied the work of another author (whether that author is a peer, classmate, or published author), the case will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

## ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION

The success of this course requires the contribution of all scholars. When you are absent, you miss an opportunity to learn from the other scholars, and they miss an opportunity to learn from you. If the absences are beyond your control due to health or family reasons, let me know as soon as possible. Such excused absences still impact your grade, though that impact may be reduced. If you are late, please join the class as soon as possible without disrupting the learning experience. Habitual tardiness, however, is unacceptable.

Your positive participation in the class is also vital. Participation goes beyond the number of words someone speaks to include both their contribution to the overall class and their attentiveness. Even when other scholars are responsible for presenting, be prepared to ask questions about the readings and class material and to contribute your own ideas. Disruptive behavior or disrespect shown to other scholars in the class will not be tolerated.

## **CURRENT EVENTS**

An important aspect of this course involves recognizing the relationship of our study of religions in South Asia to a variety of current events, including local, national and global developments. All students should pay attention to current events and initiate discussions of these events that are particular relevant to issues of religion, social boundaries, and identities. At the beginning of each class, students will have time to discuss a news article and the relevance that it has to course topics, whether they are topics for that day, a previous day, or a future day. Each student must present on an article from a newspaper or magazine twice during the semester. To receive credit for this participation, the student must submit a copy of the article on the day they present it, and each student can only do one article for any class meeting.

## **STUDENT READINGS AND PRESENTATIONS**

Each student will present assigned readings to the class three times during the semester. For 18 September, each student will read two articles and present about one of several Hindu movements, either historical or contemporary. This presentation should be about 5 minutes.

The other two presentations will be selected from the reading assignments marked SP. For each set of readings marked with an SP, the readings will be divided among all of the students. For each reading, two students will initiate discussions on that reading, dividing the aspects of the presentation between them. The other students who focused on that reading should contribute to the discussion that the two presenters initiate. Presentations will be graded on the presentation, the depth of understanding and analysis demonstrated, and evidence of preparation.

Each presenter should be prepared to do the entire presentation; in class, they can decide how to divide up the parts of the presentation. Each 10 - 15 minute presentation should include the following:

- Summary of the reading
- Relation of the chapter to the topics in the course
- Questions that the chapter raises for our study

## **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

For the three student presentations on readings, each presenter must submit a 1-2 page paper summarizing the reading material and addressing the relevance of the material to the course topic.

On 20 November, class will involve the viewing of a movie. Each student must submit a 3 page essay analyzing the relation of this movie to topics in the course. This essay must be submitted on or before 1 December (which is not a class day).

As with all of the writing for the course, I expect formal academic writing, even for 1 page papers. Grading will consider both the depth of analysis and clarity of expression (including grammar and style). Late papers will be penalized severely.

## **RESEARCH PAPER**

Each student must research and write a 10 page paper on a topic of his / her own choosing. This selection must take place in consultation with the professor, and everyone must select their topic by the week of 16 October. Beginning on 30 October, approximately three students will present at the end of each class on their research topic and the progress of the research. This presentation will also give them the opportunity for some feedback from their colleagues. Naturally, the expectations for the presentation increase for those who present later in the semester.

Each research paper must be a formal academic paper presenting your analysis of the material in the light of the sources in the class and outside of the class. To conduct quality research, you need a minimum of six works cited, and no more than half of them can be exclusively Internet sources. I expect quality academic research making use of the peer-reviewed journals and books in Gorgas Library. If you have questions about conducting research, please consult the professor and the research librarians in Gorgas. Full citations in a consistent format are required for quotations and paraphrases of the work of others. Further details will be provided during the semester. The papers will serve as the final exam and are due at the time set by the University for the Final Exam, 14 December at 3:30 pm. Anything submitted more than a day after the due date cannot be accepted because of the necessity of submitting final grades.

### **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS**

We may revise this schedule or adjust the readings as needed during the semester.

28 August - Introductions

4 September – LABOR DAY, no class

11 September – History of Religions in South Asia and Hinduism

1 Encyclopedia / Dictionary of Religion article on Hinduism (your choice)

David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?"

**SP:** D.N. Jha, "The Myth of the Holy Cow"

Axel Michaels, "The King and the Cow"

18 September – Hinduism

Select a Hindu movement from the list distributed in a preceding class, and read

1 Encyclopedia / Dictionary of Religion article and 1 academic Journal article on the same movement

**1 paper due on selected movement**

25 September - Buddhism and Jainism Sikhism

1 Encyclopedia / Dictionary of Religion article on Sikhism

Choose 1 Encyclopedia / Dictionary of Religion article on Buddhism or Jainism

**SP:** Kenneth Jones "Religious Identity and the Indian Census"

W. H. McLeod "The Contributions of the Singh Sabha Movement"

W. H. McLeod "The Khalsa Rahit"

2 October - Islam

1 Encyclopedia / Dictionary of Religion article on brief on Islam

Carl Ernst "Sufism"

9 October – Colonial Legacy and Partition

Ashish Nandy, "Intimate Enemy" 1-29; 96-113

**SP:** Ashish Nandy, "Intimate Enemy" pp. 29-48

Ashish Nandy, "Intimate Enemy" pp. 48-63

Ashish Nandy, "Intimate Enemy" pp. 64-79

Ashish Nandy, "Intimate Enemy" pp. 79-96

16 October – Inter-religious violence, boundaries, and identity

Shonali Bose, *Amu*

**Research topics determined**

23 October –Hindutva, Violence, and Ramjanmabhumi

Ashish Nandy “Creating a Nationality” Chapter 1, Chapter 6

**SP:** Ashish Nandy “Creating a Nationality” Chapter 2

Ashish Nandy “Creating a Nationality” Chapter 3, part V (pp. 56-80)

Ashish Nandy “Creating a Nationality” Chapter 4, part VII (pp. 100-122)

Ashish Nandy “Creating a Nationality” Chapter 4, part VIII (pp. 123-155)

30 October – Crossing Gender Boundaries

Flueckiger, Intro, 1

**SP:** Flueckiger chapter 4

Nandy “Sati” (pp. 1-31)

Nandy “Woman vs. Womanliness in India” (pp. 32-46)

**Begin research reports**

6 November- Crossing Religious Boundaries

Flueckiger Conclusion

**SP:** Flueckiger chapter 5

Flueckiger chapter 6

13 November – Diaspora, Sindhis, and boundaries

Ramey “Hindu Sufis and Sikh Gurus” Introduction, Conclusion

**SP:** Ramey “Hindu Sufis and Sikh Gurus” chapter 2

Ramey “Hindu Sufis and Sikh Gurus” Chapter 3

Ramey “Hindu Sufis and Sikh Gurus” Chapter 6

20 November – Negotiating new boundaries

In-class video “Bend It Like Beckham”

27 November – Caste and social boundaries

Ilaiah

**Response to movie due in class**

4 December – Conclusions

FINAL EXAM – 14 December, 3:30 pm

**Research papers due**